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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1094

RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE IMMEDIATE 2655

INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 3972

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 1789

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1656

RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 2225

RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1432

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0819

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000826

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD, IIP, DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/07/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: RFE/RL CONTRIBUTOR DURDYMURADOV
RELEASED AND RETURNED TO HIS FAMILY

REF: A. ASHGABAT 0820

[1B.](#) ASHGABAT 0817

[1C.](#) ASHGABAT 0811

Classified By: CDA RICHARD E. HOAGLAND: 1.4 (B), (D)

[¶1.](#) (C) SUMMARY: On July 4, a half hour before he was to leave for the airport to greet Russian Federation President Dmitriy Medvedev, Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov urgently called in the Charge. Meredov conveyed the official position of his government that detained Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) contributor Sazak Durdymuradov, a 60-year-old high-school teacher and respected member of his community, would be unconditionally released on July 4 from the psychiatric facility where he was incarcerated and returned to his family on July 5. Charge instructed the Embassy's Public Affairs Officer to contact RFE/RL journalist Gulychdurdyev to be in touch with the Durdymuradov family and, further, to tell RFE/RL in Prague to report nothing -- repeat, nothing -- until Durdymuradov's release is confirmed. On July 7, Post confirmed Durdymuradov was released and returned to his family. We strongly recommend that RFE/RL reporting avoid any hint of triumphalism and focus solely on the fact of Durdymuradov's release. Charge recommends the Department release a press statement, following on its June 27 statement, welcoming the release. END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND

[¶2.](#) (C) At midday on July 4, Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov urgently called the Charge to the Foreign Ministry. Meredov told him that Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty contributor Sazak Durdymuradov would be freed unconditionally and returned to his family.

[¶3.](#) (C) As reported reftels, Charge had increasingly upped the ante to press the Government of Turkmenistan for this outcome. Subsequent to reftel A, Charge told Meredov during the Embassy's Independence Day dinner/reception on July 2 that Turkmenistan had "crossed a red line" and that the abuse and detention of Durdymuradov would be a "dark and inhibiting

stain" on the U.S.-Turkmenistan relationship. He told Meredov the U.S. Government categorically rejects the explanation previously given (reftel A), allegedly a teacher-student, community-values conflict, and that the only acceptable solution would be Durdymuradov's unconditional release and return to his family.

¶4. (C) During their brief July 4 meeting, Meredov told the Charge he had personally intervened with President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, who had ordered a personal investigation into the matter. They found that the incident was a long-standing, ugly family conflict. Durdymuradov and his blood brother, both families living in the same house, had been feuding for eight years. The brother allegedly exploded over some perceived slight and had Durdymuradov committed to a psychiatric hospital for revenge.

¶5. (C) Meredov said the presidential investigation had gained access to all relevant documents. He insisted that the Ministry of National Security (ex-KGB) had not been involved in any way. He further said he had read all the documents of the "10 doctors" at the psychiatric facility in Lebap Province who had all confirmed that there were "no bruises or other marks" on Durdymuradov's body.

¶6. (C) Meredov said in his intervention with President Berdimuhamedov the president had been "sad" for two reasons: 1) that such a thing could have happened in Turkmenistan when he is committed to following the letter of the law on international human rights standards and practices and that

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this had become a threat to the strong U.S.-Turkmenistan relations we have worked so hard together to build, and 2) that the U.S. Government had alleged that he, Berdimuhamedov, was a "gangster." (NOTE: For this latter, see the "Washington Post" op-ed on July 2 by RFE/RL President Jeffrey Gedmin, "Reporting Among Gangsters." END NOTE.) Charge thanked Meredov for his personal commitment to resolving this issue and praised his follow-up.

¶7. (C) A short time later, at the official arrival ceremony at the Presidential Palace for Russian Federation President Medvedev, Charge thanked President Berdimuhamedov for having made the right decision. The president initially feigned ignorance but then said, "You made clear this was important to you. I conducted an investigation and discovered it was all a 'technical mistake.'" The Charge again thanked the president for having done the right thing and said this would be positively noted in Washington.

¶8. (C) COMMENT AND RECOMMENDATION: We have no illusion that probably Berdimuhamedov himself, possibly egged on by negative forces within his government, made the initial decision to "crush" Durdymuradov for his RFE/RL association. Even so, we are encouraged that Berdimuhamedov, under measured pressure, can move in the right direction. It is essential that RFE/RL and others not take a triumphalist approach in reporting Durdymuradov's release. It should be noted with satisfaction, but that's all. The Government of Turkmenistan will need time to heal from this confrontation -- even though it was the guilty party. We recommend the Department issue a press statement on July 7, following on its June 27 statement, welcoming Durdymuradov's release. END COMMENT AND RECOMMENDATION.

HOAGLAND